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THE ISSUE OF THE GERMAN ELECTIONS.

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IMMIGRATION.

Duo quum faciunt idem, non est idem,—the same thing done by two persons is not the same thing. Bismarck dissolved the Reichstag but twice, first in the eleventh, secondly in the twentieth year of his régime as Chancellor. Caprivi was but at the beginning of the fourth year of his Chancellorship when he was forced to take the extraordinary step, that *ultima ratio* of a more or less constitutional modern State,—dissolution of Parliament. Bismarck, the Thunderer, acted on both occasions in his true lightning style—in 1878, when the Reichstag refused to pass the law against the Socialists, and in 1887 when the same majority of the Imperial Parliament, half liberal and half clerical, made provision for the military *état* for but three years, instead of for the seven years demanded. In his significant, resolute way Bismarck abruptly sent the self-styled representatives of the people home, at once entered upon a vigorous campaign, and succeeded each time in carrying out his wishes, by overwhelming majorities, within a few weeks after the opening of the new Reichstag. Emperor William II., who wanted to be his own Chancellor, and the well-disciplined, distinguished soldier whom he had detailed to the highest executive office of his Empire, wasted many months in futile bargaining for a majority, until at last a hostile decisive vote and the ensuing dissolution were rather enforced against their will. The electoral campaign then conducted was awkward, lifeless and inefficient, and resulted, as shown below, in the signal defeat of the government's plan. The difference between the Bismarckian statecraft and that of the New Era is marked. And yet precisely the same

leading idea guided the actions of both ; the same thing was done by the old and by the new Chancellor.

All who could read the signs of the times knew, or at least might have known, that the hour for a new election was as ill-chosen as was the issue of the government's campaign. No more unpopular issue could be presented to the German people than an increase of the military burdens ; and perhaps the most unpropitious time during the last decade for forcing that issue was the spring of 1893. The first septennate fixed the peace strength of the Army, for the years 1874-1881, at 401,659 privates and sub-alterns ; the second (1881-1888), at 427,000 ; and the third (1887-1894), initiated by Bismarck before the expiration of the second, originally at 468,409, but that number was increased, in 1890, by amendment, to 486,983. Two years later Chancellor Caprivi, who had in 1890 solemnly affirmed the impracticability of a further increase, demanded that the fourth septennate, or rather quinquennate (October, 1893—March, 1899), be fixed at no less than 570,877 men yearly,—despite the fact that the Reichstag in 1890 granted the government's request only with the proviso, insisted upon by the famous Windthorst, that in future the peace strength as well as the expenditures for military purposes would be materially reduced. After that time the ordinary expenditures of the Empire, aside from the Army, were considerably increased, resulting in a large and serious addition to its federal debt, while the revenues from customs duties were cut down not a little by the commercial treaties of December, 1891. The net yearly expenditures for the army, subsequent to 1879, increased from 361 to 535 million marks, and the Federal debt, during the same period, rose from 139 to 1,755 million marks, with annual interest charges of 9,000,000 and 66,000,000 marks, respectively. How in the world, under such circumstances, could a further increase in the yearly expenditures of more than 60 millions (without counting the so-called extraordinary expenditures of more than 100 millions which were in fact moneys invested in the added armament) have been thought of as a popular issue ?

The Germans are patriotic. They are proud, and justly so, of the grand achievements of the old Emperor and his great Chancellor. In fact, Monsieur Chauvin, in the Fatherland as well as in France, has only too prolific an offspring willing to sacrifice important rights and liberties to the delusive glory of military

supremacy. But the people of the Fatherland, though valiant in war, are quite prone to economy in time of peace, and the greatest exponent of the German spirit, Prince Bismarck, was himself well aware that the renowned *furor teutonicus* must first be aroused. Now, the prospect of continued peace was certainly better at the time of the introduction and discussion of Caprivi's oppressively burdensome army bill than it had been for years. In France, Germany's traditional arch-enemy, the party of peace and order were seemingly in full power, and the Panama affair was claiming all of the nation's attention. Czar Alexander had apparently forsaken his ancient grudges, the product in his mind of the treacherous ingratitude of the Hohenzollerns and the crafty ambiguity of the House of Hapsburg. And even if excitable France should again suddenly become an easy prey to declamatory, heaven-aspiring revolutionists and ambitious, pompously-mounted generals, or if greedy Russia, flushed with self-confidence upon the completion of her great re-armament of deadly repeating rifles, should precipitately throw off the artful mask of self-restraint, of what avail was a plan of army re-organization, the effects of which could not be fully realized for ten or, perhaps, fifteen years? Hence, while the political optimists were able easily to ridicule the bugbear of a great war with two fronts, the pessimists might, with at least as much reason, reject as impracticable any scheme of thorough re-organization of the army in the face of menacing foes.

Then why, it may be asked, did William II. select that unfortunate issue? Young, energetic and self-confident as the Emperor is, no one will attribute to him such lack of intelligence as failure to understand the weakness and inconsistency of the arguments advanced, in behalf of an *Armeevorlage*, at that time, by the most eloquent orators and the most brilliant writers whom he could enlist in his service. And the Chancellor, though by no means a genius of the Bismarck type, should not be underrated, for many tests have shown him to be a general of excellent abilities and a statesman of more than average judgment. Neither Emperor William, nor Chancellor Caprivi, without apparent injustice to their sagacity, can be supposed to have entirely overlooked the unavoidable effects of such a military bill, its public discussion during no less than nine months, the wavering position of the government, the refusal by the latter to accept any

measure of compromise proposed by the Liberals, the final though overdue acceptance of such a measure when offered by an ultra-montane aristocrat, the surprising rejection of the bill and of all compromise by a large majority, and the consequent dissolution of the Reichstag. Undoubtedly Germany's ruler was fully aware, in accord with public opinion, that a decisive governmental majority, if any, was not to be expected as the result of the approaching election, and that the campaign must necessarily lead to an augmentation of the socialistic vote and of its so-called conservative pendant, anti-semitism. Why then, it will be asked again, did William II. pursue such a course? To one well versed in German and Prussian history and their constitutions the answer is so obvious that I am surprised that the daily press seem to have missed it.

On paper both Prussia and Germany possess constitutions and enjoy, nominally, constitutional government. There is, indeed, a Prussian as well as a German Parliament. But no greater mistake could be made than to liken those constitutions and Parliaments to those of Great Britain. To perceive this clearly it is necessary but to recall the royal decree of January 4, 1882, evidently formulated by Bismarck :

"The right of the King to direct the government and the politics of Prussia, according to *His own will* has been restricted, by no means abrogated, by the Constitution. . . . The Prussian Constitution is but the expression of the monarchical traditions of the country, whose development is based on the eternal relations between the King and His people. . . . It is, therefore, My will, that both in Prussia and in the legislative bodies of the Empire no doubt shall be left about My, and My successors', constitutional right to *personally direct the policy of My government.*"

Bismarck once said, in a speech before Parliament, in his picturesque style of oratory :

"Prussian royalty has not yet fulfilled its mission ; it is not yet ripe to be a purely ornamental decoration of the constitutional structure ; it is not yet ripe to be inserted as a dead piece of machinery into the mechanism of parliamentary government."

Emperor William II., though he dismissed the teacher, is a true disciple of the Bismarckian doctrine. Even more than his illustrious grandfather, and certainly much more than his good father, young William II. is not satisfied to reign ; he wants to govern, and in a manner and to a degree unthought of by any Prussian monarch since the inauguration of the constitution. With him it is not alone

a "constitutional right personally to direct the policy of His government," but first of all the divine prerogative of a king by the grace of God. He was in dead earnest when he resurrected the obsolete motto of Roman Cæsars : *Sic volo, sic jubeo ; sit pro ratione voluntas* (So I will, so I command ; My will takes the place of reasons). He revealed his inmost mind when he emphatically declared not long ago that he never could agree with people who responded to his command with a "Yes, but !" and that all he wanted was "Yes, so then !" His conception of loyalty may be measured by his appeal to his Brandenburgers to follow their Margrave blindly through thick and thin. His soul is filled with the ideals of a soldier, and it is but natural that he is extremely sensitive not only to the threatened loss of military supremacy for Germany but, perhaps even more, to the growing difficulty of finding a subservient Parliament.

And this difficulty is growing, rapidly and alarmingly. The spirit of the German, wherever found, is naturally independent. He bowed to the overawing genius and almost superhuman energy of Bismarck, though with great reluctance, gnashing of teeth and restiveness. But once liberated from the incubus, the old Germanic spirit of independence re-asserted itself, much to the surprise and chagrin of the young ruler in the so-called New Era. The Emperor in vain attempted to decoy one faction after the other. He abolished the severe anti-Socialistic law and tried to cajole the "little man" ; he flattered the Poles and conceded to them some valuable rights ; he gave to the Liberals commercial treaties, and tried, but lamentably failed, to give to the Prussian Conservatives a school-law to satisfy their dearest wishes ; he delivered the Guelph treasure of 48 millions to the heirs of the dethroned King, and 16 millions of confiscated property to the Catholic clergy, and so on. But all in vain. A concession made to one faction served only to whet its appetite and to arouse the jealousy of all the other factions. The spirit of dissatisfaction grew and had as its basis the general desire to insist upon the people's right of self-government independent of the fluctuating wishes or whims of the ruler.

After all his small devices had been exhausted there remained but one issue on which the Emperor could hope to unite several factions in support of the government. Since the day of Sadowa that issue had never failed in the Old (Bismarckian) Era. There

was but one possibility of breaking the spirit of parliamentary independence, and that was by means of a new army bill appealing to the needs of self-protection and to the patriotic desire of preserving the achievements of bloody wars. Even though a new election might increase the votes of socialistic and anti-semitic peace-breakers, that, it was believed, should make the friends of law and order more desirous of a strong government. The fact that the proposal to increase the army coincided with the personal desires of the Emperor but strengthened the unfortunate line of arguments which led to the introduction of Caprivi's bill and its portentous consequences.

But the people of Germany did not accept the issue presented to them by an ill-advised and short-sighted government, and that is the key to the situation. The electoral battle was actually fought and decided on the issue of *Parliamentary* (i. e., *People's*) *rule against Emperor's rule*, and it was certainly not the latter which came forth with flying colors. The rulers of the New Era have ignominiously lost this battle. The defeat of the Emperor's *voluntas* is the one overshadowing result of the recent German elections. It marks an important phase, possibly the turning point, of the great struggle of the German nation for real constitutional government. In comparison with the paramount importance of this one result even the most interesting details of the election dwindle to the level of mere incidents. The apparent annihilation of the Richterites, the dismal failure of the government to disrupt the mighty party of the Centre, the growth of socialistic and anti-semitic votes, the strength developed by the Poles, the weakness of the Alsatian protest party, the defeat of the free-traders and the increasing contrast between North and South Germany, all these and other favorite topics of the daily press are simply products of temporary coincidences. The effects will not last long. But the victory of the people's right to assert their will in the policy of the government will and cannot fail to impress the future development of the German nation.

JOSEPH H. SENNER.